



Mao Tse-tung

**THE QUESTION OF
INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE
WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT**

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THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT	213
Help and Concessions Should Be Positive, Not Negative	213
The Identity Between the National and the Class Struggle	215
"Everything Through the United Front" Is Wrong	215
NOTES	217

**THE QUESTION OF
INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE
WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT^[*]**

November 5, 1938

**HELP AND CONCESSIONS SHOULD BE POSITIVE,
NOT NEGATIVE**

All political parties and groups in the united front must help each other and make mutual concessions for the sake of long-term co-operation, but such help and concessions should be positive, not negative. We must consolidate and expand our own Party and army, and at the same time should assist friendly parties and armies to consolidate and expand; the people want the government to satisfy their political and economic demands, and at the same time give the government every possible help to prosecute the War of Resistance; the factory workers demand better conditions from the owners, and at the same time work hard in the interests of resistance; for the sake of unity against foreign aggression, the landlords should reduce rent and interest, and at the same time the peasants should pay rent and interest. All these principles and policies of mutual assistance are positive, not negative or one-sided. The same should be true of mutual concessions. Each side should refrain from undermining the other and from organizing secret party branches within the other's party, government and army. For our part we organize no secret party

* This is part of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concluding speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party. At the time, the issue of independence and initiative within the united front was one of the outstanding questions concerning the anti-Japanese united front, a question on which there were differences of opinion between Comrade Mao Tse-tung and Chen Shao-yu. In essence what was involved was proletarian leadership in the united front. In his report of [*cont. onto p. 214. -- DJR*] December 1947 ("[The Present Situation and Our Tasks](#)") Comrade Mao Tse-tung briefly summed up these differences:

During the War of Resistance, our Party combated ideas similar to those of the capitulationists [referring to Chen Tu-hsiu's capitulationism in the period of the First Revolutionary Civil War], that is, such ideas as making concessions to the Kuomintang's anti-popular policies, having more confidence in the Kuomintang than in the masses, not daring to arouse and give full rein to mass struggles, not daring to expand the Liberated Areas and the people's armies in the Japanese-occupied areas, and handing over the leadership in the War of Resistance to the Kuomintang. Our Party waged a resolute struggle against such impotent and degenerate ideas, which run counter to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, resolutely carried out its political line of "developing the progressive forces, winning over the middle forces and isolating the die-hard forces", resolutely expanded the Liberated Areas and the People's Liberation Army. Not only did this ensure our Party's ability to defeat Japanese imperialism in the period of its aggression, but also, in the period after the Japanese surrender when Chiang Kai-shek launched his counter-revolutionary war, it ensured our Party's ability to switch smoothly and without loss to the course of opposing Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary war with a people's revolutionary and to win great victories in a short time. All Party comrades must keep these lessons of history firmly in mind.

branches inside the Kuomintang and its government or army, and so set the Kuomintang's mind at rest, to the advantage of the War of Resistance. The saying, "Refrain from doing some things in order to be able to do other things",^[1] exactly meets the case. A national war of resistance would have been impossible without the reorganization of the Red Army, the change in the administrative system in the Red areas, and the abandonment of the policy of armed insurrection. By giving way on the latter we have achieved the former; negative measures have yielded positive results. "To fall back the better to leap forward"^[2] -- that is Leninism. To regard concessions as some thing purely negative is contrary to Marxism-Leninism. There are indeed instances of purely negative concessions -- the Second International's doctrine of collaboration between labour and capital^[3] resulted in the betrayal of a whole class and a whole revolution. In China, Chen Tu-hsiu and then Chang Kuo-tao were both capitulators; capitulationism must be strenuously opposed. When we make concessions, fall back, turn to the defensive or halt our advance in our relations with either allies or enemies, we should always see these actions as part of our whole revolutionary policy, as an indispensable link in the general revolutionary line, as one turn in a zigzag course. In a word, they are positive.

page 215

THE IDENTITY BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

To sustain a long war by long-term co-operation or, in other words, to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan -- such is the fundamental principle of the united front. Subject to this principle, the independent character of the parties and classes and their independence and initiative within the united front should be preserved, and their essential rights should not be sacrificed to co-operation and unity, but on the contrary must be firmly upheld within certain limits. Only thus can co-operation be promoted, indeed only thus can there be any co-operation at all. Otherwise co-operation will turn into amalgamation and the united front will inevitably be sacrificed. In a struggle that is national in character, the class struggle takes the form of national struggle, which demonstrates the identity between the two. On the one hand, for a given historical period the political and economic demands of the various classes must not be such as to disrupt co-operation; on the other hand, the demands of the national struggle (the need to resist Japan) should be the point of departure for all class struggle. Thus there is identity in the united front between unity and independence and between the national struggle and the class struggle.

"EVERYTHING THROUGH THE UNITED FRONT" IS WRONG

The Kuomintang is the party in power, and so far has not allowed the united front to assume an organizational form. Behind the enemy lines, the idea of "everything through" is impossible, for there we have to act independently and with the initiative in our own hands while keeping to the agreements which the Kuomintang has approved (for instance, the Programme of Armed Resistance and National Reconstruction). Or we may act first and report afterwards, anticipating what the Kuomintang might agree to. For instance, the appointment of administrative commissioners and the dispatch of troops to Shantung Province would never have occurred if we had tried to get these things done "through the united front". It is said that the French Communist

page 216

Party once put forward a similar slogan, but that was probably because in France, where a joint committee of the parties already existed and the Socialist Party was unwilling to act in accordance with the jointly agreed programme and wanted to have its own way, the Communist Party had to put forward such a slogan in order to restrain the Socialist Party, and certainly it did not do so to shackle itself. In the case of China, the Kuomintang has deprived all other political parties of equal rights and is trying to compel them to take its orders. If this slogan is meant to be a demand that everything done by the Kuomintang must go through us, it is both ridiculous and impossible. If we have to secure the Kuomintang's consent beforehand for everything we do, what if the Kuomintang does not consent? Since the policy of the Kuomintang is to restrict our growth, there is no reason whatever for us to propose such a slogan, which simply binds us hand and foot. At present there are things for which we should secure prior consent from the Kuomintang, such as the expansion of our three divisions into three army corps -- this is to report first and act afterwards. There are other things which the Kuomintang can be told after they have become accomplished facts, such as the expansion of our forces to over 200,000 men -- this is to act first and report afterwards. There are also things, such as the convening of the Border Region Assembly, which we shall do without reporting for the time being, knowing that the Kuomintang will not agree. There are still other things which, for the time being, we shall neither do nor report, for they are likely to jeopardize the whole situation. In short, we must not split the united front, but neither should we allow ourselves to be bound hand and foot, and hence the slogan of "everything through the united front" should not be put forward. If "everything must be submitted to the united front" is interpreted as "everything must be submitted to" Chiang Kai-shek and Yen Hsi-shan, then that slogan, too, is wrong. Our policy is one of independence and initiative within the united front, a policy both of unity and of independence.

NOTES

[1] A quotation from Mencius. [p. 214]

[2] V. I. Lenin, "Conspectus of Hegel's Book *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*", *Collected Works*, Russ. ed., Moscow, 1958, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 275. [p. 214]

[3] "The doctrine of collaboration between labour and capital" is the reactionary doctrine of the Second International, which advocates such collaboration in the capitalist countries and opposes the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois rule and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. [p. 214]
